

**22nd Sunday in the Old Testament
Series C.**

October 20, 2013
Genesis 32:22-30

Jacob Wrestles With God

²² That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴ So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶ Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷ The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. ²⁸ Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome." ²⁹ Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. ³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."



People of God—rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

When I was in high school—the toughest—physically most powerful teacher we had was the wrestling coach--Mr. Grubbs. Mr. Grubbs was a wiry little man with steel cables for muscles. In gymnastics -on the rings--he would do that thing called an iron cross—upside down—nothing moved! When I was in High School we had a cinder quarter mile track. Part of gym class would be to run around that track. Sometimes—some gym teachers would ride in golf carts beside us, yelling, "Hey, you guys—run faster!" Mr. Grubbs used to run with us— backwards—yelling, "Hey, you guys—run faster!" Later in the day—if you walked past gym doors—open to the track you would see Mr. Grubbs—running backwards—in front of another class—yelling, "Hey, you guys, run faster!" Mr. Grubbs was physically powerful—physically strong. Today—this 22nd Sunday after Old Testament Thanksgiving—God's Word talks about being—by grace alone—spiritually powerful! Today we will take a chapter out of the life of Jacob as God's Word encourages us:

Wrestle With God in Prayer!

- I. We are helpless on our own
- II. By grace we cling to God's Gospel Promises.

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on—is from the book of Genesis—the book of beginnings. Before the beginning of time and space—for ever and ever—without beginning is God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At just the right moment—God created the heavens and the earth—this huge muddy egg—and the Holy Spirit hovered over the earth—the way a hen broods over an egg. Step by step the Almighty organizes and fills—so that after 6 days—there is space—filled with the sun, moon, stars and planets—far beyond our ability to understand—space that is measured in millions of light years. The earth is organized—oceans, lakes, rivers,

streams, creeks, marsh and swamp—fresh water and salt water—filled with whales—enormous mammals—and tiny sea horses—clams and crabs and lobsters—clown fish that swim in huge clumps and bunches. The forests filled with trees—whose leafs are pumpkin and cinnamon and cranberry and orange and peach. Forests full of white tail deer and raccoons and possums and squirrels and chipmunks little field mice—ducks and geese and crows and pheasants and bunnies. All this works together—to give glory to the Creator. Genesis talks about the beginning of marriage—one man and one woman—becoming one flesh—blessed sometimes with children. The beginning of work—of labor—jobs to do before there is any sin—jobs that give glory to God—gardening and farming—planting and harvesting. Genesis talks about the fall into sin—forbidden fruit and Satan the tempter. It talks about the wages of sin—painful childbirth—thorns and thistles and rocks in the fields—sweat and grief and ultimately death itself. Genesis—the first promise of a Savior—who would crush the Serpent's head. There is Abraham—then Isaac—then Jacob—their marriages and families troubled by sin. There is Abraham—having hugs and kisses with Hagar—Sarah's hand-maiden. Hagar gives birth to Ishmael—and there is family grief. There is Isaac—married to Rebekah. They have twins—Esau and Jacob—pushing and shoving and kicking each other—even before they are born! There is Isaac—who loves Esau—the hunter—the manly man best. There is Rebekah—who loves Jacob best and that's not a secret either. Jacob and his mom trick the aged and infirm Isaac and Jacob steals the birth-right the blessing that was supposed to go to the first-born. Isaac dies—Esau threatens his twin brother's life—and Jacob literally runs for his life!

Fast forward—after 20 years apart Jacob and Esau are about to meet again! Jacob is painfully concerned—so he decides to try and soften up his brother with gifts.¹³ **He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau:** ¹⁴ two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams,¹⁵ thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys.¹⁶ He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, "Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds."¹⁷ He instructed the one in the lead: "When my brother Esau meets you and asks, 'Who do you belong to, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?'"¹⁸ then you are to say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us.'" ¹⁹ He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: "You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him.²⁰ And be sure to say, 'Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.'" For he thought, "I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me."²¹ So Jacob's gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp. Genesis 32:13f

²² That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.²³ After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions.²⁴ So Jacob was left alone... Jacob had 2 wives—his first wife Leah—then his first love—the sister he wanted to marry in the first place—the lovely Rachel. Jacob also had his wives maid servants—Bilhah and Zilpah—4 women he had "hugs and kisses" with—and a total of 11 sons from these 4 ladies. This was not the marriage—the family that his Heavenly Father intended—but this was the painful reality that night. So...Jacob was left alone... What happened next is what Jesus' disciples called, "A hard saying." This was not simple. This was not easily understood. It's not because God and his Word are unclear—somehow flawed. The problem is—we are weak—slow to understand and slow to believe.²⁴ **So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.**²⁵ When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched

as he wrestled with the man.²⁶ Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." Jacob wrestled through the night. This was at the same time both a physical struggle—arms and hands and legs and back—and a spiritual struggle—a wrestling in prayer—laying hold—holding fast to the Gospel promises of God! As the morning approached—the Lord—think of this like the Son of God—in physical form—present already in Old Testament time. The Lord says—"Let me go!" Jacob hangs on—so the Lord simply touches Jacob's hip—and this massive joint is suddenly and completely out of wack! "Let me go..." Jacob says—"Not until you bless me!" The Lord had promises to bless Jacob—and Jacob was clinging to that gracious promise." That's good and God-pleasing.

"What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered.²⁸ Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome." Jacob—the heel grabber—literally the heel grabber—literally the usurper. That's what Jacob had been. From now on—he would be Israel—the Prince—the one who struggled/wrestled with God and hung on! Have you wrestled with God in prayer—wrestled a blessing from your Heavenly Father? Sometimes we wrestle in prayer. Someone we love is in a terrible accident—they have a heart attack or a stroke or they have a brain aneurism—and their life hangs in the balance! We pray with passion—literally on our knees—literally with tears in our eyes—our hands folded tight—our heart and mind are focused like never before! We pray that God would have mercy on the one we love—and spare their physical life. Maybe it's a spiritual struggle—against an addiction to drugs or alcohol or pornography. Maybe it's someone we love—and they are falling away from saving faith in Jesus' forgiveness. We pray for them again and again—morning, noon and night and in the middle of the night—when you wake up and look at the digital alarm clock and it says 1234—34 minutes after midnight—and you are wide awake and you pray some more! Hang on to the Gospel promises of Jesus! What are those promises? We need to read our Bible to know them! Read the 365 places in the Bible where it says again and again, "Don't be afraid!" Hang on to the Gospel promises in Philippians, "Don't be anxious about anything—but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God—and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus!" Cling to the Gospel promises of God—when God's Word says in 1st Thessalonians—in the newest edition of Forward in Christ, "Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks under all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Gospel promises like **all things work together for good for those who love God.**" The promise that you will not be tested beyond what you can endure. With the difficulty will come the strength to persevere! The Psalm we sang today—**Psalm 121—I will lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD**—the Great I AM—the Holy One of Israel—who like John Wayne and the cavalry will come over the hills to the rescue! So—we don't need to be afraid!

²⁹ Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

God's name is his saving reputation—everything the LORD has revealed about himself. Jacob wanted to know more! Who exactly was he wrestling with? But the LORD did not owe him an explanation. **Then the LORD blessed him**—promised Israel the ultimate blessing—a Savior who would die on the cross to take away all our sins. God has blessed us so much! I see the commercials for the Wounded Warrior Project again and again. They show wounded soldiers—men and women—with mechanical stainless steel arms and legs. They show people who have tubes in their throats to help them breath. They show people who have been burned—all over their face—all over their body—people with parts of their heads missing. People with Post

Traumatic Stress Disorder—their wounds like my Uncle George who fought at Normandy—wounds in their heart and mind and attitude that no bandage can heal. In some respects these are the most painful wounds of all. There are people everywhere with painful wounds on the inside—caused by sin. I read today about a father—who was drunk—watching a football game with his 19 year old son. Supposedly they got in a fight over this football game—to the point that the son—head-butted his father—who fell down the stairs—then got a hand gun and shot his son to death—in front of his son's girlfriend—with a baby in her tummy! There is pain and grief—sin and sadness everywhere! The only solution is not to be found in our hanging on to Jesus! We are far too often—far too weak to hold on to Him. The priceless Gospel—good news is Jesus holds on to us—with his nail marked hands. He will hold us close. And by grace alone he will bless us. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony E. Schultz